# INTRODUCTION

The events of 2014 in Ukraine took Europeans drastically back to the realities of power politics. They demonstrated ways in which an aggressor sought to legitimise a new model of warfare whereby unidentified professionally trained armed forces acted under the guise of paramilitary formations formed from the local population. Not only did power politics return to Europe, but a new specificity of the operation of violence management, the military as a social and political group, also appeared. In current warfare and in studies of military history, we are encouraged to turn back to the practice of paramilitarism, when the execution of a campaign is based on a synergy of the actions of irregular and regular special forces.



Warfare in the contemporary world, just as in medieval Europe, is developing on two levels. On one hand, the enemy can be dealt a decisive blow with advanced military technology, precision-guided weapons, and aviation and missile systems. On the other hand, as is proven by practice, the activities of different paramilitary groups, insurgents, guerrillas or terrorist groups, operating according to their own free will, ideology, religion, and hatred for the enemy, enable resistance against regular army units for months and even years, with a minimum of resources. Professionally trained medieval knights on an open battlefield were able to defeat any enemy who was no match for them technologically or tactically; however, they suffered painful defeats when they had to fight in a wooded or swampy area, with the enemy attacking from behind cover, in other words, when using *guerrilla* tactics.

The slightly forgotten phenomenon of paramilitarism was a distinctive historical event in Europe (and especially Eastern Europe) in the 20th century, and its impact on the process of the formation of ideology, national structures, and national identity has not been fully explored so far. The operation of irregular armed formations is an old historical phenomenon, which, with changes in the character and circumstances of warfare, acquired a special significance during the First World War and afterwards. During the last decade, studies have sought to look for links between the development of national ideologies and paramilitary movements, and to analyse common sources of paramilitarism ('national militarism') in Western and East-Central Europe. They've analysed the impact of the political and cultural elite on the organisation of these movements, seeing paramilitarism not only as a military and political phenomenon, but also as a social and cultural one that crossed national borders.[1]

[1] Cf. *People in Arms. Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution.* Ed. by D. MORAN, A. MORAN. Cambridge, 2002; WILSON, T. *Frontiers of Violence. Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922*. New York, 2010; *Political Violence in Twentieth Century Europe*. Ed. by R.

The very term *paramilitarism* should not be understood as a mere synonym for guerrilla warfare (the historical examples of the Spanish and Mexican *cueras*, or the Italian *carbonari* in the 19th and early 20th centuries, might be recalled). The concept of *paramilitarism*, formulated in the 1930s, covers not merely the military activities of paramilitary organisations that operate alongside regular forces or instead of them, but also ideological and cultural preparedness ('cultural mobilisation') for the prospective struggle to maintain statehood.

As is disclosed by research into military history, paramilitary groups are especially important after a defeat: when the regular army is unable to stop enemy attacks, regular, professional, and, it would seem, technologically superior military units find it difficult to defeat paramilitary formations. After the First World War, the citizens of East-Central Europe who became soldiers were able to drive regular army units out of disputed areas. The anti-Soviet guerrilla resistance in Lithuania was not defeated by troops of the Soviet army and the NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) on the battlefield, but by means of harsh repressive measures (deportations, collectivisation, or open terror) which undermined the civilian support for the fighters.



Paramilitary groups that face stronger regular forces in an armed conflict usually turn to asymmetric-guerrilla tactics. The history of East-Central Europe in the 20th century is rich with examples of guerrilla resistance, related to the formation and operation of paramilitary structures. These tactics are predetermined by imbalances in human, economic and military resources. The military forces of a small state set the goal not of defeating or annihilating the enemy, but resisting and gaining time for the political leadership to find a diplomatic solution or to get support from abroad. Therefore, voluntary citizens' structures formed in times of peace (institutionalised paramilitary organisations), due to their strong moral motivation and patriotism, can resist in circumstances when regular armed units surrender.[2] The mere fact that paramilitary units are able to hold out for a certain period of time is a moral victory that prevents the aggressor from establishing political power *de facto* in an occupied area.

In the east Baltic region, and in this collection of papers we seek to attract attention to parallel processes that took place. The roads to independence of different states after the First World War were different. However, the stimuli in all cases were identical. The external stimulus was the power vacuum that emerged in the region, and the geopolitical changes caused by the collapse of the Russian and German empires. The internal stimulus was the formation of citizens' paramilitary groups on a volun-

GERWARTH, D. BLOXHAM, Cambridge, 2011; *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*. Ed. by R. GERWARTH, J. HORNE. Oxford, 2012 (translation into Lithuanian: *Karas taikos metu. Paramilitarizmas po Pirmojo pasaulinio karo 1917-1923 m.* Vilnius, 2013).

[2] The issue is comprehensively discussed in Vytautas Jokubauskas' monograph: JOKUBAUSKAS, V. *„Mažųjų kariuomenių" galia ir paramilitarizmas. Tarpukario Lietuvos atvejis,* Klaipėda, 2014.

tary basis, active social mobilisation, and a 'war after the war' that embraced the entire region, and in some cases acquired particularly bloody forms (for example, during the Civil War in Finland, over 1% of the population perished). Tomas Balkelis argues that 'they [Baltic paramilitary movements] continue to enjoy their privileged positions in the collective memories of the Baltic societies.'[3] This argument may be a bit too bold; however, the significance of paramilitary organisations in the period between the First and Second world wars, both in strategies for the development of national militarism (different concepts of defence) and in the process of cultural mobilisation, as well as in the dissemination of national (patriotic) ideology, was great. All the organisations that were active in the Baltic region, the Finnish Suojeluskunta, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (Šaulių sąjunga), the Latvian Aizsargi, the Estonian Kaitseliit, and the Polish Związek Strzelecki, operated in the period 1918 to 1920 as paramilitary units (the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union participated in military campaigns up to the spring of 1923), and all of them became instruments for patriotic education and national mobilisation in their own countries in the interwar period. Moreover, the legacy of paramilitarism was one of the links that united the events of the years 1918 to 1923 and radicalisation in the cultural and political context at the beginning of the 1930s,[4] while in the Baltic countries and Western Ukraine, the phenomenon of paramilitarism repeated itself in the guerrilla struggle against the Soviet Union after the Second World War.



Events typical of the entire region, and the obvious need for a transnational perspective in historiography, encouraged the compilers of this volume to assemble a team of authors whose efforts would enable the reader to see kindred regional paramilitary organisations from a comparative viewpoint. By involving Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Polish historians, we sought to reveal the circumstances of the formation of these organisations, their activities, social composition, organisational structure, and integration into the defence systems of the states of the east Baltic region. We admit to a failure to attain all the goals we set. This can partly be accounted for by a shortage of researchers; and in some cases, our colleagues simply failed to meet their obligations on time and to submit the requested papers.

The activities of paramilitary organisations are presented in several sections in this volume. First of all, the question is asked where the idea for the formation of voluntary citizens' organisations or units came from. The example of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union is analysed by Vygantas Vareikis, who emphasises the links between the idea of 'riflemanism', as was formulated by Vladas Putvinskis, and kindred

[3] BALKELIS, T. Turining Citizens into Soldiers: Baltic Paramilitary Movements after the Great War. In *War in Peace...*, p. 143.

[4] GERWARTH, R.; HORNE, J. Paramilitarism in Europe after the GreatWar. An Introduction. In *War in Peace...*, pp. 16–17.

movements in East-Central Europe and the Baltic region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The synchronic manifestation of a 'war after the war' in the Baltic region that started in 1918 is regarded as a particularly important stage in the organisation of paramilitary units. The expression of the phenomenon in Lithuania and Latvia after the First World War is reviewed by Tomas Balkelis and Ēriks Jēkabsons. The idea of Ēriks Jēkabsons that guerrilla groups which operated in Vidzeme and northern Latgala created a serious obstacle to the establishment of Soviet power, and Latvian guerrillas collaborated with units of the Lithuanian army in ousting the Soviet Latvian units from the country, is worthy of note.

Most of the papers in this volume are devoted to an analysis of the structure of paramilitary organisations that were active in the Baltic region in the interwar period, and their role in the defence systems and societies of their respective countries. Four papers analyse different aspects of these issues relating to the example of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union. The paper by Vytautas Jokubauskas offers new data on the national, religious and social composition of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, and reveals the dynamics of the growth of its membership and the processes of cultural mobilisation. In national defence doctrines, the riflemen are seen as implementers of Lithuanian defence plans, who, in the event of danger, would use guerrilla warfare tactics. The papers by Jonas Vaičenonis and Simonas Strelcovas give an overview of issues of the integration of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union into the Lithuanian defence system. The paper by Mindaugas Nefas reveals a specific and so far uninvestigated aspect of the riflemen's activity: the funding of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union and its relations with Lithuanian emigres. In two of these four papers (by Jokubauskas and Vaičenonis), the analysis of Lithuanian materials is supplemented by comparisons with neighbouring countries, primarily with Latvia, Estonia and Finland. The papers by Waldemar Rezmer and Urmas Salo also serve the purpose of comparison. Waldemar Rezmer presents the organisational structure of the Polish Riflemen's Union, and Urmas Salo presents the structure of the Estonian Kaitseliit and its role in the national defence system in the interwar years.

The fourth aspect that the compilers of the volume sought to emphasise was the role of paramilitary organisations in the dissemination of nationalist ideology, serving the interests of authoritarian regimes, and the maintenance of their respective ideological images. The research by Hektoras Vitkus is devoted to this issue, and it reveals changes in the images of 'others' (ethnic minorities) in the ideologies of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, the Latvian Aizsargi, and the Estonian Kaitseliit. The author shows how the struggles for independence, the development of the parliamentary system, presidential dictatorships, and political crises preconditioned social

radicalism, the assignment to the categories of *allies* and *enemies*, and the division of ethnic minorities into 'reliable' and 'unreliable'.

We trust that this collection of papers will be another step in the research into paramilitarism in the east Baltic region through the development of comparative and transnational research perspectives, and that it will find readers both among narrower (historians and humanities specialists) and wider audiences.

We believe that the appearance of the collection *Paramilitarism in the Eastern Baltics, 1918-1940: Case Studies and Comparisons* also has another meaning. When considering the opportunities for the prospects of military defence in the Baltic region, it is necessary to understand the contexts of the past, and to master the lessons of the past in order to exploit the experience of military preparedness of geopolitically and historically close countries. Had the riflemen of interwar Lithuania not been trained for combat operations, the underground guerrilla resistance against the Soviet Union would possibly have never happened. Without the Lithuanian guerrilla struggle in the years 1944 to 1953, Lithuania's independence might never have been restored. As is shown by the military conflict in the Ukraine, the intensifying military activities in the Baltic Sea region, the manoeuvres on the borders of Lithuania, and the revived military rhetoric in Europe, the theoretical considerations of preparation for the defence of a small country under conditions of a hybrid war, and historical research into paramilitarism, are not such a distant military phenomenon as medieval knights or linear combat tactics are. *Praemonitus praemunitus*.



Vygantas Vareikis